THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by Elinor Wylie, Babette Deutsch, Joseph Auslander, John Dos Passos, Luis Muñoz Marin, and others

Sandburg's New Book Reviewed

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Gifts at Meeting

From the Greek.

VIOLETS, sparsely
Budded, to wreathe
With sprigs of parsley;
A kid to seethe
In its own juices
Dilute with wine;
Sweetmeats from cruises
Transpontine;
A sapling, studded
With apricocks,
Cream, new-crudded,
Butter in crocks;
A barrel of tunny,
A barley bun;
Combs of honey
That smell like the sun:
Plaited withies
Piled with white grapes;
From Persian smithies
Smooth dagger-shapes;
Cups of lapis
And mirrors of bronze;
Springes, to trap us
Geese and swans;
A wild deer's haunches
And a lion's head;

Coral branches
Silver and red;
A pirate's earring
And a painted book,
I bring you, fearing
Your blackthorn crook.

Preference

THESE to me are beautiful people;
Thick hair sliding in a ripple;
A tall throat, round as a column;
A mournful mouth, small and solemn,
Having to confound the mourner
Irony in either corner;
The limbs fine, narrow and strong;
Like the wind they walk along,
Like the whirlwind, bad to follow;
The cheekbones high, the cheeks hollow,
The eyes large and wide apart.
They carry a dagger in the heart
So keen and clean it never rankles. . . .
They wear small bones in wrists and ankles.

Elinor Wylie

Dark Gates

OH, strange Beloved, lying there asleep,—
where do you keep
the thought that answered mine?
The words whereof the night distilled her wine
wither, unsaid.
And I must drink
a slow and bitter silence in their stead.
Your hidden eyes,
your hands,
are secret, changed.

You are a wanderer I do not know,
and all the music of your limbs is dead.
Beloved, is it you? And is your sleep
a thing to leave love's lovely marble shaken?
I have called you,
and you did not awaken.

Babette Deutsch

Candles and Torches

CUP hands over the candle
Against the draught; let it turn
Feebly in its socket;
Let it yearn,
As it must and will, to be a rocket—
And fail. It is a candle:
Let it burn!

Some hands grasp torches
And brilliant flambeaux; some light
At the silent altar,
Trembling, white,
Their candles. If they hesitate or falter—
Patience! They are not torches,
They are slight.

Cup hands over the candle
Against the draught. Will you spurn
The pale uneasy flare
Beside the urn,
The flicker of a ghost upon the stair?
Be kind. It is a candle:
Let it burn!

Joseph Auslander

Exchange

BE satisfied with me
That put away for you
Under this flawless grain the mobile tree,—
The tree that knew
Black, roofless nights and warm
Fine rain at winter's leaving,
And wet, hushed interweaving
Of branches in the storm.

Of that rough, windy ending
You have no more to fear.
Now the unseasoned shriek of fibres rending
Will not distress your ear.
What did you seek?
I can be cool and sleek,
Pliant and bending,—
I can be still or speak
In mellow notes or thin,
Piccolo, violin—or what you will.

But never ask again
The sound of leaves in rain.

Jessica Nelson North

Dust in the Wind

HAVE you ever watched blackbirds lifting from a cornfield,
Climbing the dawn, warping like written words,
Myriad-dotting the sky,
The sky that's withdrawn in crimson and mauve
Before the onset of bright gold . . . ?
Dust in the wind.

Dust is the color of the hayricks squatting in cool peace
With mounded backs and a poise of mild prayer;
Dust is the color of the hayricks
Worshipping in bleached stillness
And watching for the hushed gold hands of the sun. . . .
Dust in the wind.

The cornstalks crispen and fade on a Kansas farm
And in Missouri too they flag brokenly
Under a keen wind rummaging a late October sky.
And what does the wind quarry and what does the wind find
Since the ivory fruit is garnered and the pith is gone
Under a late October sky?
Dust in the wind.

Earth-brown silhouettes diminished by distance
Graze the long grass of the shadowy prairie,
And the long necks,
Grace in each arch, are like sculpture come alive
And light was the sculptor,
Light from the east, a softly flooding land-line. . . .
Dust in the wind.

Night stumbles running backward over the fields;
Ploughs nestle, huddled close to the dun-rowed loam,
Listless they lie and idle, forgotten by the night,
Cheek to cheek next the brown-ridged furrows
And the slow shadows forsake them.
Dust in the wind.

Hands waken, hands mazed in dreams colored like the earth,
Waken from a crowded dream of harvests stacked and stored;
And the hands, moving through the fertile dreams,
May not forget the furrows, may not forget the plough
For even in the unearthy fields of sleep they quiver and tingle
For that far-off fuller yield.
Dust in the wind.

Pierre Loving

Juniper Country

Juniper

FOR some twisted reason, I
Love what many men pass by,—
Lean-fingered and rock-clinging things,
Bitter-berried, far from springs
Of sweet water, wringing up
Moisture from the rock's own cup,
Or drinking in at every pore
Dew and sea mist, if no more:
All things harsh, and slow of root,
Pungent, racy, sparse of fruit,—
Heather, gorse, and upland fir,
Lichen, moss,—and juniper!

What are two lean years, or three,
Bantling of Necessity,
Who on stony-breasted earth
Long since learned to thrive on dearth?
—Long as ledges, will endure
Your rock-fed green and roots obscure;
Ay, will batten on the stone
After man is dust and bone.

The End of the World

'TWAS time they parted; spring was coming on!
Each day that passed, his eyes grew deeper yet;
His voice broke sometimes on a word like "gone,"
On tell-tale words like "never" and "forget"!

'Twas time they parted; for she woke with singing,
She listened for his step in the frosty dawn;
Birds were stark mad, and cuckoo-flowers were springing—
'Twas time they parted; spring was coming on!

The Tamarack Tree

"MAKE a true song of me!" the tamarack cried
At the far edge of the pasture (would I could!)
"Make a true song!"—Nor would it be denied,
Crying aloud from the outskirts of the wood.

Here was no beauty to ensnare the eye;
That spidery green, that meagre rough-scaled girth,
Made a poor figure spread out on the sky:
—But how life filled it, climbing up from earth!

"Make a true song"—I knew it would not do
To forge one word—"A true song, if you can:
Make such a song as I should make of you,
If I, a tree, should sing about a man!"

Sea Fog

THE world's a ten-rod circle; hills are gone,
Unless this floor of scrub and meadow-sweet
Slanting to hidden nothing, on and on,
May be a hill,—I guess it by my feet!

The fir-tree dares not shake or even sigh,
For fear of spilling beauty, bright as brief;
The silvered cobweb scares away the fly,
And quicksilver slides down the mullein leaf.

Oh, fog-drops strung on birch like beads on hair!
On each red barberry there hangs a tear . . .
What wonder I forget the outer air,
Shut in with a little beauty plain and near?

Here's privacy with weeds, relief from sky,
A hollow in gray space; a place, may be,
Where one might lay disguises safely by,
And strip to the heart in fog from off the sea!

Abbie Huston Evans

Quais: Rive Gauche

SEE how the frail white pagodas of blossom
Stand up on the great green hills
Of the chestnuts,
And how the sun has burned the wintry murk
And all the stale odor of anguish
Out of the sky,
So that the swollen clouds bellying with sail
Can parade in pomp like white galleons
Over the blue.

And they move, the slow plumed clouds
Above the spidery grey webs of cities,
Above fields full of golden chime
Of cowslips,
Above warbling woods where the ditches
Are wistfully patined
With primroses pale as the new moon,
Above hills all golden with gorse,
And gardens frothed
To the brim of their grey stone walls,
With apple bloom, cherry bloom,
And the raspberry-stained bloom of peaches and almonds.

So do the plumed clouds sail,
Swelling with satiny pomp of parade,
Towards somewhere far away,
Where in a sparkling silver sea,
Full of little flakes of indigo,
The great salt waves have heaved and stirred
Into blossoming of foam,
And, lifted on the rush of the warm wind,
Towards the gardens and the spring-mad cities of the shore,
Aphrodite, Aphrodite is reborn.

And even in this city park,
Galled with iron rails,
Shrill with the clanging of ironbound wheels
On the pavings of the unquiet streets,
Little children run and dance and sing
With spring-madness in the sun,
And the frail white pagodas of blossom
Stand up on the great green hills
Of the chestnuts,
And all their tiers of tiny gargoyle faces
Stick out gold and red-striped tongues,
In derision of the silly things of men!

John Dos Passos

Spring Building

*

AT noon the sound of hammering dies and wind
Scatters loose shingles from the untended gable.
The carpenter at the door-frame, grizzle-skinned
And gaunt, spits brown as far as he is able.
He steps across the mud upon a stone
Where, with an elbow and an arm at rest,
He sits, half quiet. He is not alone.
I watch him as he leans against the West.

* *

Not from the carpenter, but from the things
Men never know of men I look away,
And where I look a massive mountain flings
Dark rocky fingers tipped with rosy gray
Up through its snowy mantle at a sky
Steeled to a perfect temper of keen blue.
The breath of a thin wind blows faintly by,
More warm, more lovely now than hitherto.
Not so much at the peak as at the things
I know of it I look through the noon ease,
Made wistful by near songs and nearer wings
And runnels of singing water and sighs from trees.

Not sharply, but through distances and veils
I wonder at what earth's elements arrange;
The rock, the tree, the flesh and blood that fails.
I wonder where in this evolving change
I stand that life burns so in breast and limb.
I wonder, and in the wake of wonder fear
Comes with its rapture to that mind, grown dim
With safety which so blindly led me here. . . .
Here where the forest waits its time for falling
And mountains feed their power to little streams
And after dark the hungry beasts go calling
And last year's leaves lie rotting in sun-beams.

* * *

Now I stretch out my arms in ravishment,
Or would but for the near-by carpenter,
Toward that old mountain in devout dissent
From too much human triumph, too much stir
Of the absurd infinitesimal
Before my eyes. I stretch out eager arms
At least in spirit, and the great ice-fall
Which once lay thick above these valley farms
Seems like a living thing, and the vast sea
Whose silty shifting piled these pinnacles
Heaves once again in deep tides over me
Sweeping strange pain with passionate old swells
Up from my heart to islands in my eyes.
Now I submit to what I almost know
And laugh in hope of being so made wise
Because I too survived that long ago
Gestation and am now a man who hires
Others to raise my walls and lay my sills
And bring me food and scuttle out my fires
Under the watchful silence of these hills.

Raymond Holden

Vignettes

Soldiers

THE pavement lifts up to the height of a man
And marches . . .
Muffled and swift, softly bobbing, unwinding.
Flags droop
Weighted with red premonition.

Day

The sunlight hours rise like golden wheat
Until the night comes as a darkening storm
And sharp white stars beat down the wheat,
Like hail in August.

River

The sea, impatient, paces the long beaches . . .
Unhesitant and trembling the river hastens from the South.
She drops impeding cloaks of shores and reaches
The sea's enclosing rush, his lips upon her mouth.

Moon

She thrusts open the mountains,
Steps on the black marble stairways of forests,
The sandals of the silver rivers on her feet.
She dances, shimmering, the dance of seven veils;
And in the morning flings from her the earth—
That, dew-wet, drips
Like the head of John the Baptist.

Kathryn White Ryan

He Makes a Picture of His Love

WHEN I rose
The mist hung from the trees like a cobweb.
Being lonely of you
I made a fire a little way from my fallen log,
And sat looking at you, living you, singing you,
Till the wind tore the mist away
And the last gray-red twigs crackled into silence.

Moods

I WOULD sing of soft things today—
Foliage, furs, yielding distances,
The bosom of my beloved.

Yesterday I sang of strong things—
Winds, rivers, mad slaves,
A mountain carrying me on its back to the sky,
The bosom of my beloved.

Finis

BELOVED, let us break our hearts now,
As keen swords are broken
Before rust
Darkens the stars upon their blades.

Counsel

DO you grow weary of waiting in vain
For a bolt of song out of the silence of the stars?
Bend low with me
And listen to the dreams of the dry weeds—
The rain-dreams, the flower-dreams
Of our brothers the dry weeds!

Luis Muñoz Marin

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Sandburg Over-Does It a Little

Slabs of the Sunburnt West, by Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York.

ONE is always drawing morals and maxims, mostly useless, from the books he reads; pursuing the custom I gather from Carl Sandburg's *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* that it is an error for a poet of ability to write nothing but personal lyrics. Mr. Sandburg wrote excellent lyrics of his own kind when he was younger. He writes more perfect though less passionate lyrics now. But there is nothing to remember from his whole output except cadences and phrases because he has never used any artistic form except the cadence or phrase. He has carved his reliefs and gargoyles on sidewalks and stone fences all up and down the land. You know his work when you see it. It is sometimes peculiarly poignant, powerful or revealing. But he has never made a building of his own. He is not, or has not chosen to be, an architect. There is not a cathedral to his credit, not an arch. His fantasies are held together by nothing more enduring than a personality.

That is of course his business, and no doubt he likes it better that way. If he had cathedrals in mind he would start building them. Cathedrals are out of style; so is the perfected whole of any sort. But I cannot get it out of mind that the elements which wear everything down to earth will take him and his words the sooner because he scorns formalities, blue prints, even cement. Personally I rate him as high as Whitman, but I think Whitman will go the sooner too, for the same reason.

With this unnecessary introduction out of the way it is enough to point to one or two flaws and one or two master touches, as I see them. Everybody knows Mr. Sandburg. His poems speak for themselves. He is virile, delicate, whimsical, at will. His control over his medium has degenerated in some of these *Slabs* into affectation. The title of the book is almost a parody, and so is the title poem. So is the word of the "tall scar-face ball player" over the unknown soldier:

> It's all safe now, buddy,
> Safe when you say yes,
> Safe for the yes-men.

Safe for the yes-men, hell. If you call that safe it is soon enough safe for all of us—yes-men, no-men, beggar men and thieves. This is the lowest form of salesmanship, and if I read him aright Mr. Sandburg approves.

Yet he can be ruthlessly honest, also, as in *At the Gates of Tombs:*

> Civilizations are set up and knocked down
> the same as pins in a bowling alley.
>
> Civilizations get into the garbage wagons
> and are hauled away the same as potato
> peelings or any pot scrapings.
>
> Civilizations, all the work of the artists,
> inventors, dreamers of work and genius,
> go to the dumps one by one.
>
> Be silent about it; since at the gates of tombs
> silence is a gift, be silent; since at the epitaphs
> written in the air, since at the swan songs hung in
> the air, silence is a gift, be silent; forget it.

There is no sounder sense in the volume than this, but there is better poetry. Those who want it will find it.

Maxwell Anderson

A Negro Poet

Harlem Shadows, by Claude McKay. Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York.

THERE is a terrible simplicity, an unconscious pride and lifting of the head, about the poems of this negro poet—the first poems of a negro, as Max Eastman says in his introduction, which are interesting not simply because the writer is a negro but because he is also a poet. Something

of the nobility which honesty and courage make, something sad and stark and utter, is about these poems which deal with his hatred of the white race which has oppressed his own, with his love of beauty, with the lusts of his flesh, with the gnawing grief for his mother who died ten years ago. Of her he writes

> Reg wished me to go with him to the field,
> I paused because I did not want to go;
> But in her quiet way she made me yield
> Reluctantly, for she was breathing low.
> Her hand she lifted slowly from her lap
> And, smiling sadly in the old sweet way,
> She pointed to the nail where hung my cap.
> Her eyes said: I shall last another day.

Most obvious in the book are the conflicts which pull him many ways, more conflicts than even the usual poet has, and which may make of him a better poet than the usual. There is not only the fear which all artists have of losing human joys and living through their art, the strange and inconsistent yearning to be ordinary and as others are; but there is also the racial struggle between a burning hatred of the white race, and a keen, young, zestful attraction by it, by the life, the achievements, the knowledge, it has to offer. Life and art would be unbearable for this young negro poet, were it not for the cooling loveliness of his own lyricism, and the relaxation of an occasional humorous, though still sad, detachment which makes him able to write verses like *Alfonso, Dressing to Wait at Table,* and *On the Road,* concerned with colored waiters in a swaying, hot, and crowded dining car. Even *The Lynching* becomes more bearable because he is able to face it, describe it exactly as it is. Poets are compensated for their over-burden of feeling by their power to get relief. When a race, like a person, gets too conscious, it must speak. This man, "darkly-rebel," avid for freedom and liberation of every kind, possessed with the desire to help his people, has done for them here what will in the long run help them most—freed them out of dumbness, out of dark life into its recreation, art, which is a lighter, truer, more relieving thing.

He has not yet found his medium, I think. He says himself:

> O word I love to sing! thou art too tender
> For all the passions agitating me;
> For all my bitterness thou art too tender,
> I cannot pour my red soul into thee.
>
> O haunting melody! thou art too slender,
> Too fragile like a globe of crystal glass;
> For all my stormy thoughts thou art too slender,
> The burden from my bosom will not pass.

There is the feeling that, in spite of the easiness and inevitability of these regular forms, he will some day break away from them, get darkly-rebel about prescriptions for lines as about other things, and have his fling at something all his own: although it is also quite certain that he will come back in the end to regularity, when he has made himself independent of it and can use it from conviction and choice, not from necessity.

There is a faint, piquant tinge and flavor of what we love as quaint and different, and have come to expect, in colored people's talk; sometimes this is conscious, in descriptive, reminiscent poems, and very rarely it is unconscious, when a strange, spontaneous little line like "But soon again the risky ways I tread" slips out. Who else would say "the risky ways"?

But far more important than any of the traces which mark him colored, any of the conflicts which mark him individual, are the simple clearness, the freshness, the new exactness, the occasional startling loveliness, which mark him poet. Here are a few bits which may bear me out:

> Upon thy purple mat thy body bare
> Is fine and limber like a tender tree:

and

> Save where a few shrubs melancholy, lone,
> Detained a fragile shadow;

and

> But in the socket-chiseled teeth of strife
> That gleam in serried files in all the lands.

There is no one perfect poem in the book, but still one thinks already eagerly about his second book. He has one poem *To a Poet,* beginning, "There is a lovely noise about your name." Its last stanza brings us very close to the man who is, even more essentially than a colored man or a rebel, a poet:

> But the rare lonely spirits, even mine,
> Who love the immortal music of all days,
> Will see the glory of your trailing line,
> The bedded beauty of your haunting lays.

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Contributors

John Dos Passos is most popularly known in connection with fiction, particularly the widely discussed *Three Soldiers,* but he is also the writer of many poems, which are soon to be collected in a volume.

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